

Exonerate Ethel: Executive Summary

What was the effort to Exonerate Ethel?

In 2016, the Rosenberg Fund for Children (RFC) and the Meeropol family launched a petition campaign calling on President Obama to exonerate Ethel Rosenberg, after the release of previously secret grand jury records provided additional proof that Ethel was not a spy, and that the government knew that at the time but prosecuted and executed her anyway. The petition garnered massive press coverage and tens of thousands of supporters, and significantly altered the public narrative about Ethel.

Why was there a campaign to exonerate Ethel Rosenberg?

In July 2015, previously secret government material (attached, Section 1) at the heart of the case against Julius and Ethel Rosenberg was made public. It demonstrates that the U.S. government knowingly manufactured the case against Ethel to pressure Julius to cooperate.

As a result of this release, the Rosenberg Fund for Children – in concert with Julius and Ethel's family – launched a petition at www.rfc.org/ethel (attached, Section 1) calling on President Obama to exonerate Ethel before he leaves office.

Who supported the campaign?

U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren, U. S. Senator Edward Markey, Michael Moore, Angela Davis, Noam Chomsky, Daniel Ellsberg, former MA Governor Michael Dukakis, U.S. Congressman Richard Neal (1st District, MA), and U.S. Congressman Jim McGovern (2nd District, MA), as well as more than 60,000 concerned people around the world supported the exoneration effort. Photos and statements from prominent signers are available at www.rfc.org/exonerate-ethel (attached, Section 3).

Why was this effort important?

It was essential to do this because:

- The U.S. government understood Ethel was not a spy but manufactured a case against her, and executed her, anyway.
- Our faith in our democracy requires that our government correct its transgressions.
- Ethel's execution took place at the height of the anti-communist hysteria of the McCarthy Era. Today we're witnessing a resurgence of the same kind of attacks, only now, they're aimed at Muslims, immigrants, and transgender people; as well as Black Lives Matter organizers, environmental activists, and others challenging our system.

What did the campaign accomplish?

The petition to President Obama garnered 60,000 supporters, both from within the ranks of RFC donors, and beyond. It also received extensive media attention that had global reach. And

remarkably (given the history of negative bias towards the Rosenberg case) all of the prominent, mainstream news reporting cast the exoneration campaign in a very positive light.

On December 1st, Robert and Michael brought their effort to the gates of the White House. With news cameras rolling, they stood in the same spot where they had been photographed in 1953 as six and 10-year-olds. As children, they delivered a handwritten letter for President Eisenhower to the guards at the gate, five days before their parents were killed.

At the 2016 event, the brothers issued a statement calling on President Obama to rise to the challenge and do the right thing, not just for Ethel but for the country (attached, Section 2).

Even though President Obama was not moved to act, the campaign was resoundingly successful at changing the narrative about Ethel Rosenberg and educating the public about the dangers of government overreach. In the process, tens of thousands of new people were introduced to the Rosenberg Fund for Children's work aiding activist families who are under attack in this country today.

How did the Press Cover the campaign?

National press coverage for the effort started in October of 2016. *60 Minutes* aired a rare, double-length story interviewing Ethel's sons Robert and Michael Meeropol and exploring the miscarriage of justice in the Rosenberg case. In the wake of that broadcast, media built to a crescendo by the end of 2016.

NPR's *Morning Edition* and *Here and Now*, *CBS News*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN*, *Democracy Now!* and *The Nation* were among the many national outlets that did original reporting about the exoneration campaign. Newspapers and radio shows from Canada, England, Israel, Germany and Austria interviewed the Meeropol brothers. An Associated Press article appeared in more than 30,000 newspapers.

The Boston Globe wrote about the campaign repeatedly and its editorial board endorsed the effort with a full-page call for Obama to act (attached, Section 4). Their stories noted the fact that four members of the Massachusetts delegation in Congress got involved in the effort: U.S. Senators Elizabeth Warren and Ed Markey, and U.S. Representatives Jim McGovern and Richard Neal.

And even Fox News covered the campaign favorably, with a story on a stunning report from the Seton Hall School of Law about the government's egregious actions towards Ethel (attached, Section 4), published in mid-December. Fox's headline read, "Legal scholars claim new evidence shows Ethel Rosenberg was innocent in infamous spy case."

Press coverage of the Exoneration campaign is collected at www.rfc.org/press-coverage-exoneration-campaign.